

The Native American  
Women's Health Education  
Resource Center



**SHAKEN BABY  
SYNDROME**



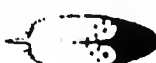
**This Information  
Could  
Save a Child's Life**

## **What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?**

The term "Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)" describes the injury that can result when a baby or young child is shaken. Because the neck muscles in children under 2 years of age are weak and undeveloped, shaking can cause the head to move back and forth violently. As the developing brain moves back and forth within the developing skull, the brain can bruise or become otherwise damaged. This can permanently damage the child, and can even result in death.

Shaken Baby Syndrome generally occurs in children under the age of one, and those under 6 months old are most often the victims.

A 1994 study found that 50% of the offenders were the natural parents of the victim, 17% were non-relative caregivers, 17% were boyfriends of the mother, and 6% were step-parents.

Physicians have been aware of the dangers of shaking young children for over 20 years. However, physicians believe that SBS may have been undetected much more often, or may have been misdiagnosed as SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). More recently, sophisticated medical techniques have made a diagnosis of SBS much easier. 

# **NEVER SHAKE A BABY!**

Some parents and caregivers think that shaking a baby is safer than spanking. This is simply **NOT** true.

The force of the brain against the skull in a baby or small child can be risky to the health and well-being of that baby or young child. The soft brain literally moves from side to side within the rigid skull, tearing fragile blood vessels, and causing areas of swelling and bruising on the brain. The force of impact between the two can cause irreversible damage.

## **Shaken Baby Syndrome can cause:**

- speech and learning disabilities
- delays in normal development
- attention deficit disorders (ADD)
- eye damage (retinal hemorrhages)
- blindness
- hearing loss
- seizures
- damage to the spinal cord (paralysis)
- brain damage
- **death**



## **Did You Know...**



Even playfully tossing a baby in the air or vigorously bouncing a baby on the knee can be damaging if the baby's head is not properly supported.

## THE FACTS

- A recent study found that 50% of victims of SBS died as a result of shaking, and 20% suffered blindness with mental retardation.
- At least 25% of infants are at high risk for being shaken.
- 25-50% of the American public does not know that shaking an infant can cause brain damage or death.
- The primary reason a baby is shaken is due to the inability to console his or her crying.
- ONE incident of shaking can severely injure a baby.
- Children as old as 4 years old have been known to suffer from the effects of SBS.
- Almost 80% of the perpetrators of SBS are male.



### **Warning Signs of SBS**

If the baby exhibits any of the following symptoms, take him/ her to a medical facility immediately:


- lethargy/ decreased muscle tone
- difficulty breathing
- extreme irritability
- seizures
- decreased appetite, vomiting for no apparent reason
- bruises on shoulders, neck, or upper arms



## When Baby Cries...

Being a parent or caregiver is not an easy job. However, it is important to remember not to direct anger and frustration at a baby or young child.

Babies usually cry when they are hungry, wet, tired, or need company. Sometimes it's difficult to make a baby happy again. The following are suggestions for helping manage difficult or frustrating situations with a baby or young child:

- Stay calm. Take a deep breath and remember that you are the adult.
- Offer the baby a pacifier.
- Hold the baby against your chest and walk or rock him/her.
- Take the baby for a ride in a stroller or car or put him/her in a baby swing.
- Check for signs of illness (fever, swollen/red gums, red ears). The baby may have a medical reason for crying, and may need to be seen by a physician. Some babies cry because they have "colic," and have a difficult time settling into life.
- To prevent crying, feed the baby slowly, and burp the baby often.
- If you breastfeed, avoid onions, beans, coffee, tea, and cola.
- Call a friend or relative for support during these times. 

*If you have met the baby's basic needs and have done your best to calm the crying baby, it is OK to leave him or her in a safe place (i.e. crib) and check on him or her every 10-15 minutes. Sometimes babies just need to cry. This is much safer than shaking.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

*SBS Prevention Plus:*  
1-800-858-5222

*The Native American Women's Health  
Education Resource Center:*  
1-605-487-7072

The Native American Women's Health  
Education Resource Center  
P.O. Box 572  
Lake Andes, SD 57356  
Phone: (605) 487-7072



Prepared by Rachel J. Young

